

Sports **Tennis** Martina wins Wimbledon C1

LifeStyles **Summer** Take care of bumps, bruises G1

Local **Spencer** Getting away with murder D1

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### SPECIAL REPORT

## Dealer tags: A free ride



This dealer tag allowed a Newport News restaurateur to pay no personal property tax on the Mercedes 380 SL she drives.

### Many drivers use tags to avoid taxes

**By DAVID CHERNICKY**  
Staff Writer

Thousands of Virginia drivers escape property taxes, sales taxes and other fees on their personal cars through misuse of dealer license plates, distributed under vague and poorly enforced state laws.

While state and local governments collect hundreds of dollars yearly from a law-abiding motorist, a driver with connections to a car dealer willing to abuse the privilege of dealer plates gets a free ride.

On the average car, that would mean a savings in the first year of driving of \$1,000 — the same as the maximum fine for abuse of dealer tags.

Police, tax collectors, auto dealer representatives and some state Department of Motor Vehicles officials say that some dealerships, primarily used car dealerships, have allowed relatives, friends and business associates to put the tags on high-priced cars and trucks for personal use.

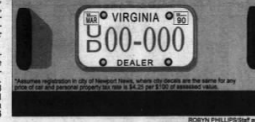
"There's definitely a financial incentive for using the plates illegally," DMV Investigator Art Hangan says. "You don't pay the state's 3 percent tax on the retail value of the vehicle. You save."

■ Please see TAGS, A7

**Dealer tags**

The average new car sold in Virginia in 1989 cost the buyer \$14,300, according to the Virginia Dealers' Association. If the dealer tags are affixed to that car, the owner can avoid a variety of taxes and fees. Here's a comparison.

With dealer tags:		Without dealer tags:	
State 3% sales tax:	\$0	State 3% sales tax:	\$429
State title fee:	\$0	State title fee:	\$10
State registration fee:	\$0	State registration fee:	\$23
City decal:	\$0	City decal:	\$27
Local personal property tax:	\$0	Local personal property tax:	\$677
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$0</b>	<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$1,092</b>



## 'Dealers' wheels: from luxury cars to trucks

**By DAVID CHERNICKY**  
Staff Writer

They drive Lincoln Continentals, Mercedes-Benz coupes and even pickup trucks. They don't have to pay taxes on those vehicles because they have auto dealer license tags.

One a York County contractor, gets his tax break because he also owns a used car dealership — a dealership with no telephone listing or business license.

Others are friends or relatives of used car dealers who give them the tags, a violation of state law.

As a result of Daily Press questions about suspected violations, the state Department of Motor Vehicles has begun several investigations, according to Don Robertson, assistant chief of DMV's field investigation division.

He said DMV is looking into use of the tags by York County land developer H.R. "Dick" Ashe, Newport News restaurant owner Kippe O'Neil, a York County auto salvage yard named Dood's and others.

H.R. "Dick" Ashe is the president of American Eastern Co. Inc., a development and construction company in York County. The company is one of the area's largest property developers and is responsible for the 270-acre Coventry subdivision, the nearby Tabb Lakes development, an industrial park, and other projects.

Ashe drives a green Mercedes-Benz. He lives in the Gratton area, but the car is not registered in York County and Ashe pays no personal property taxes on it, according to the York commissioner of revenue's office.

Outside American Eastern's office on a recent morning, the car was parked beside two modified pickup trucks — in-

■ Please see TAGS, A7

## Soviet rockets may launch U.S. satellites

### Australian firm, will use U.S., Soviet expertise

**N.Y. Times News Service**

WASHINGTON — The Bush administration has decided to allow U.S. commercial satellites to be launched on Soviet rockets for the first time, government and industry officials say.

As a result of decisions made at the White House last week, an Australian commercial venture known as the Cape York Space Agency will be permitted to hire a U.S. company to run a base in northern Australia from which Soviet rockets will carry satellites into orbit for customers from around the world, perhaps as early as 1992, the officials said.

The project provides a major opportunity for the Soviet Union to expand its international space business and is expected to increase foreign competitive pressures on the U.S. rocket industry.

Domestic rocket companies had opposed letting the Soviet Union provide launching services for U.S. customers, but the satellite makers had favored opening up the market.

Representatives for both groups said the administration's decision seemed evenly balanced, since it includes provisions intended to insure that the Soviet Union prices its rockets fairly and that the government's satellites from the government's space agency to aerospace companies.

In August, McDonnell Douglas Corp. became the first company to conduct a commercial launching in the United States, and nearly a dozen launches by several companies are expected this year.

But domestic industry faces intense competition from the European consortium, ArianeSpace, and the availability of

## New world shapes economic summit

**Dallas Morning News**

WASHINGTON — For nearly half a century, the world seemed so simple.

On one side, the United States and its allies. On the other, the Soviet Union and its satellites. And in the middle, a vast political, economic and sometimes military battleground in the Third World.

Now all that is changing, like a huge iceberg breaking up as it reaches warmer seas.

The Soviet empire has collapsed. Europe, home of some of history's most bitter rivalries, is hurching toward economic and political unity.

In short, we are witnessing the evolution of a new world in which our longtime military adversaries may become political friends while our historic allies become economic rivals.

■ Experts believe the developments in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union may overshadow economic '91.

■ Economic summits have changed drastically since beginning in 1975.

■ This week, the United States and those principal partners in the new era — Japan and a resurgent Europe led by Germany — will be in Houston as they seek to set the agenda for the 16th annual economic summit meeting in industrial democracies.

The agenda will include not only such traditional subjects as trade and monetary policy but

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## Superchute developer dies in Texas crash

The Newport News pilot who successfully tested a safety parachute for small airplanes last month was killed Saturday afternoon in a stunt plane crash in Texas.

Henry W. "Rocky" Jones Jr. died when his aircraft collided with another stunt craft and was sent hurtling into cornfields at the New Braunfels Municipal Airport, about 25 miles northeast of San Antonio.

Jones was in the third lap of the race, and attempting to pass a plane flown by former space shuttle commander Robert F. "Bob" Gibson when the two collided about 3 p.m.

Jones and Gibson were flying single-engine midget planes in a Formula One air race that was part of an air show attended by about 4,000 people. No one on the ground was injured.

Jones, 69, was a Newport News resident who had been an Air Force fighter pilot and retired after 38 years with Hughes Aircraft Company.

Jones' Midget Special plane lost a wing in the collision and tumbled



Naval sealings: Under the watchful eyes of 'Curtis Strange Navy,' Mark O'Meara's putt on the 16th green Saturday during the Aronson-Busch Golf Classic. The 'Navy' anchored on the James River, later delayed a putt by leader Larry Wadkins as Curtis Strange passed within view on the 17th hole which can also be seen from the river. Wadkins finished with a 3-stroke lead over Strange going into today's final round of the tournament. Complete coverage begins on C1.

## Weight given to notion of serial killer

**By BONNIE CROCKER**  
Staff Writer

Local, state and federal law-enforcement officials are testing the theory that the murders of three Hampton Roads couples and the disappearance of a fourth are the work of the same killer or killers, according to people familiar with the investigations.

Meanwhile, several police agencies are cooperating to launch a publicity campaign, including a series of local television broadcasts this summer, to seek new information and warn citizens that the killer or killers may strike again.

Authorities long have speculated that the cases of the four couples — starting with a 1988 double murder on the Colonial Parkway and continuing through the discovery of two bodies last October near an I-64 rest area in New Kent County — might be the work of a serial killer. In the past, however, they have characterized this only as one of several possibilities.

But the joint investigation by local